From Harlem to Havana and Back Again: Ruin, the Performative Politics of Survival, and the Ambivalent, State-Sponsored Detective in Chester Himes' *Harlem Domestic* and Leonardo Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones*

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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My dissertation puts in conversation a Cuban detective novel series set in Havana in 1989, Leonardo Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones*, with Chester Himes's African-American detective series set in Harlem between 1957 and 1969, *Harlem Domestic*. My project investigates the setting and the construction of Harlem and Havana as mythical sites of cultural production and cultural history in the Americas. Tracing the long tradition of cultural exchange between the two cities, I ground my study in their shared relationship to a particular kind of social fragmentation which I call the *Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus.* My project takes advantage of this *Idiosyncratic Nexus* as a key analytical tool of cross-pollination which affords an opportunity to utilize one aesthetic tradition to read the other and vice-versa. My study further explores the manner in which the detective novel form is used to write through the acute socio-economic and spiritual crises within which the respective series are set and corresponding discourses of disillusionment, dislocation and decadence. I explore the extent to which both series engage in subversive interrogations of State power and neglect vis-a-vis the hard- boiled detective fiction and police procedural forms.

My project is comprised of three chapters. Chapter 1, "'A Dream Deferred?': Dynamism, Decay and the Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus," lays out the cultural histories and roots of the *Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus* and employs theories of "ruin" and "ruina" to read the construction the Harlem and Havana imaginaries in *Harlem Domestic* and *Cuatro estaciones*. Chapter 2, "Why Not the Private Eye?: The Insider as Outsider in Chester Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) and Leonardo Padura's *Paisaje de Otoño* (1998)," analyzes various theories of the modern State in order to explore discourses of social positionality and select State power relative to the police detective protagonists and the police procedural form in the two novels. Lastly, Chapter 3, "'I Will Survive': Performance and the Politics of Self-Preservation in Chester

Himes's *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965) and Leonardo Padura's *Máscaras* (1997)," deploys theories of performance to analyze various performative modalities as survival strategies—creative responses to fragment and ruin in the two novels.

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Introduction

"The literature of our time is exhausted by interjections and opinions, incoherences and confidences; the detective story represents order and the obligation to invent."
--Jorge Luis Borges, *On the Origins of the Detective Story*

"Detective fiction has its norms, to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to "improve upon" detective fiction is to write 'literature' not detective fiction."
--Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*

"Roland Barthes, for example, is able to extrapolate on the meaning of a sign that reads simply 'Steak and Chips' and arrive at an understanding of French society. If it is possible to understand a society in some way through reference to its most popular dish, it should be possible to do so through its most popular fiction, no matter how 'low' an art form this may be considered by the traditional literary establishment."
--Stephen Wilkinson, *Detective Fiction in Cuba Society and Culture*

"To historicize the linkages between the cultural movements in Harlem and Havana is to build upon the voluminous comparative literature scholarship that is largely responsible for our understanding of these movements."
--Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*

Born in the US in the middle of the 19th century, the detective story is a particularly modern idea/narrative mode. In his seminal essay on the modern aesthetic and its corresponding zeitgeist, "The Painter of Modern Life," Charles Baudelaire goes about the task of explaining this new phenomenon that he terms "modernity" based on observations regarding the actions and sensibilities of his narrative subject, Monsieur G., a kind of quintessential modern dandy. Baudelaire describes how he is aesthetically taken by these novel urban spaces, "He marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city—landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun"(10). The city is the object of Monsieur G.'s wonder as a kind of new locus of art and culture, as the material

embodiment of modernity. For Baudelaire, modernity is an idea reified in a physical space of the city as much as it is a rhythm and a pace—it's a particular kind of space insofar as it is a particular kind of time. He characterizes Monsieur G.'s mode of going about his daily business as "hurrying, searching." And he goes on to explain, "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Every old master has had his own modernity" (12). For Baudelaire, "modernity" is the beauty found in constant motion, in the state of being influx. These "great" and "capital" urban centers would be deemed beautiful by its modern subjects due to their fascination with a kind of quotidian speed and change in motion—seemingly giving way to a kind of perpetual state of chaos.

Enter the detective story. The narrative form is born out this of this modern conceptualization of space and time and the chaos that it begets. In his essay, "Defense of the Detective Story," Chesterton has argued, "we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates" (123). The site of this "chaotic world" is the modern city--be it the Poe's Paris, the London of Doyle, Christie's and Chesterton's texts, Hammett's San Francisco, Chandler's Los Angeles, or the subjects of this dissertation, Chester Himes's Harlem and Leonardo Padura's Havana. In particular, the city of the hard-boiled detective-fiction tradition is a complex idea. On one hand, it is a beautiful object, as Baudelaire observed, as a center of art and culture coupled with a seat of economic and political power, of law and order. On the other, it is the locus of abject penury, political corruption and sprawling disorder. In the hard-boiled detective tradition, the text is attempting to navigate and explore that breach between order and disorder, between the city that is at once physically planned and keenly imagined, while structurally and spiritually coming undone at the seams. Thus, the city in the hard-boiled tradition is as much a setting for the

narrative action as it is a central, paradoxical character or protagonist, "This city is a legible text, the embodiment of an ideal plan or blueprint. Hard-boiled fiction is preoccupied with describing an urban medium that escapes that order" (Braham 82).

This idea of a city and its relationship to a kind of elusive sense of order is fundamental to my comparative project analyzing Chester Himes's detective novel series, *Harlem Domestic*, set in the 1950s and 1960s Harlem, and Leonardo Padura's tetralogy set in 1989 Havana, *Cuatro estaciones*. The city is indeed a paradoxical protagonist in the novels, two faces of the same discursive coin, iconic American sister cities. They are iconic to the degree that they are American cities with international appeal and influence. Havana started out as an important Spanish colonial port city and seat of economic, cultural and political hegemony in the America. Five centuries later, though its economic power has diminished its cultural and socio-political relevance remains strong and unique, as the capital of the only communist state in the Western hemisphere. New York City as the capital of global capitalism remains an urban mecca exporting its novel brand of rugged multiculturalism. Both cities epitomize their respective socio-economic organizing systems in the Western hemisphere and I would argue globally.

My doctoral thesis also attempts to tap into a larger tradition of Cuban-US and New York-Havana based socio-cultural exchange. By the late 19th and early 20th century, the two cities had become magnets for one another. José Martí famously wrote the majority of the literary corpus in exile in New York from 1880-1892, while Hemingway spent decades in the outskirts of Havana in the mid-20th century fishing, drinking and writing---*The Old Man and the Sea* was set in Cojímar, Cuba and published in 1952. Langston Hughes and Cuba's "National Poet," Nicolás Guillén, shuttled back in forth between New York City and Havana for several decades of the 20th century to cultivate their friendship, admiring and publishing each other's

work in translation. In an interview that I conducted with Antón Arrufat in 2010 at his apartment in Centro Habana, he recounted a visit to his apartment by Guillén and Hughes, the latter accompanied by an attractive Cuban suitor, in the 1950s. The face of Harlem and the Harlem Renaissance had traveled to Havana and socio-cultural exchange was being forged as much as a literary one. The Latin Jazz and bebop players hung out in each other's clubs and played together in Harlem's 125th street and Havana's La Rampa. Musicians from both cities influenced each other's musical production. Havana's prolific rumba percussionist, Chano Pazo, arrived in Harlem in the mid-1940s. He joined Dizzy Gillespie's band and famously altered the trajectory of Jazz by helping spawn a new iteration of the thing, Bebop. I explore this example of Harlem-Havana cultural exchange in Chapter One. Havana's cabaret's were Americans' favorite playground in the 40s and 50s while Desi Arnaz danced and sang his way into US hearts via the small screen. When Castro went to New York City in 1960 during his first visit to the US since the triumph of the Revolution, he stayed in the Theresa Hotel in Harlem; he met with Malcolm X there for two hours and called Harlem home. Two decades later, in 1980, Cuban literary icons Edmundo Desnoes and Reinaldo Arenas, like Martí before them, chose to spend exile in New York City, where the latter perished and the former continues to reside on the Upper West Side. Further, in the late 1990s, urban poets/rappers from New York City with the monikers Mos Def, Common and Dead Prez descended upon Havana to perform with their Cuban counterparts, Anónimo Consejo, Papa Humbertico and Los Aldeanos, in a summer concert series named Black August. Amid the dramatic shifts in Cuban-US geopolitical and socio-economic relations resulting in a non-relationship and a policy of isolation, I would assert that cultural ties remained intact while popular culture exchange and influence endured. The closing scenes from the 1997 film, *Buena Vista Social Club*, might provide us with a kind of bookend example. The likes of

Cuban music artist greats from the 1950s, Ibrahim Ferrer and Omara Portuondo, wander the streets of New York City in awe before performing at Carnegie Hall in front of an audience whose collective adulation and admiration demonstrated by way of their numerous standing ovations underscore my point: that the political and subsequent socio-relational fissures were unable to decouple a shared popular-cultural history abounding with fondness and longing.

I would argue that it is precisely this shared history that obliges the comparative aspect of my project. In the first place, detective stories are touchstones of 20th century popular culture, broadly, and popular fiction, specifically. Some of the brightest intellectual and literary luminaries paid it close attention. Gramsci's treatment of "popular literature" is grounded by his study the detective novel. Persephone Braham, in her seminal text on Latin American detective fiction, *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons,* cites Walter Benjamin's analysis of Edgard Allen Poe's Dupin Stories (considered the first modern detective stories) to the effect that, "Poe… was the first writer to apply scientifically and aesthetically modern ideas to the messy phenomena of crime. His detective narratives were the original 'exposition of pathological manifestations" (101). Borges's fascination with the detective story and its mechanism are apparent throughout his corpus, most notably in essays such as "Roger Caillois: *Le roman policier"* and "Los laberintos policiales y Chesterton," along with short stories of the ilk of "La muerte y la brújula" and "Emma Zunz." Moreover, Peter Brooks comments in *Reading for the Plot* (1984) that Todorov's essay, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," privileges the merits of detective fiction to such an extent that it "makes the detective story the narrative of narratives" (25).

Given the important role that detective fiction has played in the literary canon, broadly speaking, my project will endeavor to focus on this literary tradition as a formal sign of this

Havana/New York City shared popular culture and history; therefore, my dissertation is a kind of comparative literary conversation deeply rooted in the Americas. The modern detective narrative, in this case, the detective novel, is uniquely suited to assist in fashioning the imaginations and narrating the stories of these two quintessential modern American cities: Harlem and Havana. Both were born of what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls "Columbus's machine," an avatar for European colonial and imperial ambition and the architecture of a socio-economic system that was bound up in exploitation, violence and a kind of mechanical chaos (Benítez-Rojo, 5). The machine created the conditions for the modern American city itself. It created the modern American city. Further, Benítez-Rojo contends that the Antilles is a "meta-archipelago," a "discontinuous strip of land," that functions as a bridge that connects North and South America, with Havana as its most important port. Thus, Harlem and Havana were linked. Consequently, in the 20th century, the detective narrative began to be used to tell the story of legacy of the "machine" in American urban spaces (Benítez-Rojo, 2-4). In particular, in the second half of the 20th century the detective novel began to be deployed to tell the story of the echoes of the "machine" in Harlem and Havana. I'm positing that the echoes of the "machine" were similarly deafening in 1950's/1960's Harlem and 1989/ Special Period Havana. Therefore, it is my contention that Himes' *Harlem Domestic* and Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones* are attempting to write through the legacy of the machine's violence, disorder, chaos, socio-economic exploitation, neglect and dislocation, And as such, both detective novel series might be read as evidence of Harlem and Havana's continued cultural-historical linkage and sites of dynamic popular cultural production (in spite of it all) while highlighting an even more consequential connections to vestiges of American colonial political-economy.

Although the two literary series, Himes' *Harlem Domestic* and Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones* share a common mechanism of the detective story, they differ immensely as it relates to time and space. The former, comprised of nine novels,[1] was set in Harlem in the late 1950s to late 1960s while the latter tetralogy is set in Havana in the 1990s; however, more important points of contact are clearly discernable and writ large. Both authors clearly see themselves as writing with respect to a shared genealogy of practitioners of urban detective fiction while enacting a kind of discursive double movement. They are at once appropriating the Cuban and US detective novel traditions while, in turn, subverting them for their own purposes. In the case of Himes, his novels transparently plug themselves into the US hard-boiled tradition, and the novels of its iconic forbearers: Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald. As Chandler wrote in his 1950 essay, "The Art of Murder"—equal parts homage to Hammett and defense of American hard-boiled detective story *ars poetica*— "Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley" (14).

The plot of Hime's novels is constructed vis-à-vis a complicated network of street, back-room, tenement and murky bar scenes of socio-economically marginalized Harlem, not the ornate salons and parlors of Paris or London, as was the case in Poe's Dupin Stories or Doyle's Holmes narratives. Hime's detective novels also borrowed from the US hard-boiled tradition by tapping into its new take on language and its use of the vernacular of the urban "mean streets" which anchored the texts' dialogue. Again, in "The Art of Murder," Chandler outlines the contours of the hard-boiled detective hero that Hammett created, paying some attention to his novel verbal expression, "He talks as the man of his age talks—that is, with rude wit, a lively

[1] The 9th novel which was unfinished at Himes' death, *Plan B,* was published posthumously in 1993.

sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness" (18). A keen illustration of this prototypical hard-boiled language can be found in the last Himes detective novel published while he was alive, *Blind Man with a Pistol.* The African-American detective protagonist team of Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are arguing with their supervisor Lieutenant Anderson about how to investigate the murder of a white playwright in Harlem who was last seen with a group of gay youth. Anderson wants the case to be low-profile due to city racial politics and Grave Digger is beside himself:

> 'Listen Lieutenant' Grave Digger said thick. 'This mother-raping white men get himself killed on our beat chasing black sissies and you want us to whitewash the investigation.' Anderson's face got pink. 'No, I don't want you to whitewash the investigation,' he denied. 'I just don't want you raking up manure for the stink.' 'We got you; white men don't stink. You can depend on us boss, we'll just go to the public gardens and watch the pansies bloom' (111).

All of Chandler's hard-boiled language markers are apparent in this passage. Grave Digger's exchange with the Lieutenant is representative of the vernacular a "man of his age" and space would use in Harlem in the late 60s. "This mother-raping white man" utilizes a particular facet of the Harlem vernacular, "mother-raping," to illustrate a kind of collective black contempt for the tradition of white "slumming" in Harlem---the act of venturing Uptown for a good time: sex, partying and drug and alcohol consumption. The contempt and disgust are apparent in the incredulous manner that he interrogates his supervisor's desire for him and his partner to "whitewash" the case and perpetrate a kind of "sham"---a performance of making the crime appear that it is not as serious as it is, without the racialized players and backdrop that are at the core of the case. Grave Digger's final rebuttal, "we'll just go to the public gardens and watch the pansies bloom," exemplifies the "rude wit" that is employed as a tool to combat the unseemly request, in the judgment of the detective pair, that their superior has just made.

While this passage illustrates, on one hand, the extent to which Himes' text is plugging, wittingly or unwittingly, into the US hard-boiled tradition, on the other hand, it is using it for its very particular ends and therefore, troubling and subverting it simultaneously. This African-American hard-boiled detective pair's questioning and belittling of the authority of its white police department "superior" is a sign of Black rage and contempt for the white establishment and hegemony in the late 1960s in northern urban centers in and outside of Harlem.

In the case of the Leonardo Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones*, there is also evidence of this discourse of double movement regarding the appropriation and subversion of national detective fiction traditions; however, the Cuban example is slightly more complex. Padura's novels, in many ways, are in contact with US hard-boiled tradition along with a distinct Cuban detective fiction lineage. In Stephen Wilkinson's ground-breaking work on Cuban detection fiction, *Detective Fiction in Cuban Society and Culture*, he draws the distinction between pre- and post-revolutionary detective fiction in Cuba. In what Wilkinson considers the pre-revolutionary period, 1915-1959, he speaks to the development of the detective-fiction tradition, much of this early period influenced by US or European stereotypical treatments of African and Chinese subjects, such as Afro-Cuban religious believers of Abakuá accused of the murder of the female protagonist in the novel *Fantoches 1926* or the radio detective series, *Chan Li Po* and its Chinese detective of the same name, in the 1930s (83-94). In the 1940s and 50s Cuban detective fiction was greatly influenced by Hammett and Chandler's new hard-boiled style as their themes of corruption resonated in Havana as well as the US. The Cuban literary critic, Fernández Pequeño, explains, "El Cubano no podía dejar de sentirse atraído por el modo en que Dashiell Hammett o un Raymond Chandler recreaban en su literatura los bajos fondos…"(105). The leading detective novelist in Cuba of the era, Novás Calvo, like Chandler, commented on Hammett's innovative

influence on his and other Cuban writers of the genre, "Noté que no solo había perfeccionado un estilo, sino que había incorporado a este tipo de novella elementos que la situaban más alla de ella, entre las grandes obras del arte literario. No había creado, precisamente, un nuevo tipo de novela policíaca sino un nuevo modo de decirla, equilibrando lo simple con lo transcendente (Wilkerson, 105). The influence of the hard-boiled sensibility on the Cuban detective fiction tradition is apparent in Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones* detective-(anti)hero, Mario Conde. As with Himes' pair of detectives, he too "talks as the man of his age talks." His language mirrors a raw, edgy, urban vernacular born in the ruinous streets, corners and solares of Havana. There is a catalog of utterances that litter the pages of the tetralogy--"que coño," "me cago en la estampa"--, expletives, or as the saying in Havana goes, "lenguaje de adultos," abundant linguistic signs of material scarcity characteristic as much of the Special Period Cuba as the Great Depression in the US. Mario Conde's gritty Havana street talk helps him embody the zeitgeist of a generation born in the 1950s who grew up in the Revolution, disillusioned by their work and sacrifice with little to show for it, in terms of quality of life.

Padura's tetralogy is also in conversation with pre-revolutionary Cuban detective fiction as well as what Stephen Wilkinson calls post-revolutionary detective fiction. In her essay entitled "A Revolutionary Aesthetic," Persephone Braham traces the development of the socialist detective novel in Cuba in the years following the 1959 revolution and the conditions that allowed it to become "the most popular literature in Cuba" (27). Generally speaking, post-revolutionary Cuban literary critics and cultural officials rejected the US hard-boiled detective novel as violent, capitalist propaganda. Therefore, the Cuban detective novel endeavored to take on this externalized US threat, literary as much as geo-political, by creating narratives anchored by CIA espionage grand plans being foiled by a Cuban detective hero abroad, always outside of

the national context. There was a didactic end to the Cuban socialist novel that aimed to instruct and prescribe particular revolutionary ideology and by extension behavior while discouraging counter-revolutionary ideology or anti-social behavior.

In the 90s, Padura begins to write a new kind of Cuban detective novel, *neopoliciaco* (33). Padura is influenced by critical, Spanish-language detective novels written beginning in the 1970s by Manuel Vásquez Montalbán in Spain and Paco Ignacio Taibo in Mexico. This *neopoliciaco* mechanism affords him a critical frame within which to rejuvenate the Cuban detective novel which he believed had grown dogmatic and out-moded compared to its Spanish and Mexican counterparts' innovation and ingenuity. In an interview that I conducted with Padura in January 2005 he comments on the impact that the ground-breaking Spanish detective novelist and intellectual, Vásquez Montalbán, had on his detective fiction. In terms of influences that informed the innovations and novel aesthetics that he wanted to insert into his texts, Padura explains, "Sobretodo, Vásquez. Vásquez Montalbán, fue un descubrimiento muy importante para mi en cuanto a esta capacidad, a esta voluntad de un estilo adentro de la novela policial" (Addison, 2). In Montalbán's arguably most important novel in his Serie Carvalho, *Los mares del Sur,* there is a moment when the protagonist/detective Pepe Carvalho happens upon an amphitheatre where a conference on the "novela negra" is taking place. Upon listening to one of the participants of the panel state that the "novela negra" is a genre created by great novelists such as Chandler, Hammett and Macdonald, he interrupts, "¿Y Chester Hymes? [sic]" (56). Having sufficiently shocked his audience while simultaneously grabbing their attention, he seizes the moment in order to contend, "…a esos tres autores hay que añadir el nombre de Chester Hymes [sic], el gran retratista del mundo de Harlem. Hymes ha hecho un esfuerzo equivalente al de Balzac" (Ibid).

Along with the influence of Montalbán's meta-literature and detective-novel poetics on Padura's detective fiction, more importantly for our purposes, it is clear that Chester Himes is privileged within the pantheon of great and influential detective novelists as it relates to his ability to imagine and re-imagine a city, via a critical realism based in the genre. It's safe to say that having read this Montalbán novel, that Chester Himes and his detective novels were also familiar to Padura and that the prominent role that they played in shaping and reshaping his detective-novel poetics was not lost on him.

Another detective novelist in the Spanish-language tradition that Padura holds in high regard, the Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, published an article in 1987, several years before Padura began writing *Cuatro Estaciones,* pertaining to the emergence of a dynamic era of Spanish-language detective fiction entitled, "La <<otra>> novela policiaca." Comparing contemporary English-language detective fiction to its contemporary Spanish-language cousin, Taibo wonders, "Después de la muerte de Chester Himes, ¿qué escritor angloamericano se ha atrevido a tratar la violencia del poder económico, la amoralidad escencial de los poseedores como Andreu Martín [a Spanish detective novelist]…?" (36).

Just as Montalbán had done, Taibo privileges Himes' detective-novel poetics within the Anglo canon. In another passage, he goes further and asserts that Himes has also had great influence on the most influential detective novelists writing in Spanish, the producers of what he coins a "nueva novela policiaca" (38). He contends that this dynamic group of detective novelists were influenced most by "los exponentes más radicales del género (curiosamente también los tardíos) Himes and Thompson, que pesaban más que los clásicos del género. La irracionalidad de la violencia, mostrada como una presencia en las ciudades que describían, que se desataba a la menor provocación, el nerviosismo de los diálogos, habían pasado de Himes y Thompson a los

autores mencionados [Vásquez Montalbán, Paco Taibo, Daniel Chavarría, Guillermo Sacomanno, Jorge Martínez Reverte, Andreu Martín, Julián Ibáñez and Juan Madrid]" (Ibid). Again, Himes's discourses relevant to the treatment of the city come to the fore in Taibo's analysis of his sphere of influence, along with those pertaining to violence and language, an urban vernacular, "el coloquialismo de los diálogos" (38). As a student and critic of the genre, Padura would probably have been aware of Taibo's (a personal friend) essay or at the very least the central arguments.

As I have demonstrated, a mere one or two degrees of separation exist between Himes's detective novel poetics and that of Padura, building a detective-fiction bridge between Harlem and Havana, as it relates to the vernacular, the ruins of the city, outbursts of violence, the idiosyncratic police detective and the genre as a subversive tool. In my view, it is imperative that the *Harlem Domestic* and *Cuatro Estaciones* are put in conversation by way of a comparative project for three core reasons: 1) both series insert themselves into their respective national-detective-novel traditions with subversive and destabilizing ends; 2) both compendiums of crime fiction are set in iconic American "sister" cities, in the midst of a socio-economic tumult expressed via a genre uniquely suited to grapple with this dramatic socio-economic transformation/upheaval; and 3) both series' detective protagonists, as explored in Chapter Two, are idiosyncratic policemen instead of private detectives and thus operate from a complicated positionality, at once insiders and outsiders vis a vis the State apparatus.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one is entitled, " 'A Dream Deferred'?: Dynamism, Decay and the *Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus.*" The chapter explores the cultural histories and roots of what I'm

calling the *Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus* while employing theories of "ruin" to read the construction of the Harlem and Havana imaginaries in *Harlem Domestic* and *Cuatro Estaciones*. I argue that the *Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus* is comprised of 1) the tradition of Harlem and Havana cultural exchange and cultural-historical linkages that span a century or more, and 2) a shared identity, as two iconic American cities whose collective imaginations are bound up in the peculiar relationship to cultural dynamism, on the one hand, and social/socio-economic decadence, on the other.

I anchor my discussion of the Harlem-Havana cultural linkages in the literary production of both cities' poet laureates, Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén, and the cultural movements that they helped lead which were integral in fashioning the two urban spaces as consequential ideas. Indeed, the chapter's title is derived from a verse in Hughes's 1955 poem, "A Dream Deferred." In addition, I discuss the artistic relationship between the ground-breaking Jazz trumpeter/band leader Dizzy Gillespie and the prolific rumba percussionist Chano Pozo in Harlem in the mid-1940's and the new musical genre that it spawned, Bebop or Cubop. Further, I attend to Theresa Hotel as kind of socio-political and cultural-historical point of contact for the Harlem-Havana nexus in September of 1960 when the Cuban delegation stayed there in the lead up to Fidel Castro's keynote UN address.

The rest of the chapter is concerned with the settings of both detective novel series, 1957-1969 Harlem for Himes's *Harlem Domestic* and 1989 Havana for Padura's *Cuatro Estaciones.* I consult the critical and theoretical texts of writers such as Ena Portela, Ralph Ellison, José Quiroga, James Baldwin and José Antontio Ponte to theorize the concept of "ruina" and "ruin" as framing mechanisms within which to attend to the socio-historic setting for the two respective series. I divide the conceptualization of ruin/ruina into three categories: physical, social and

zeitgeist. Furthermore, I utilize those theories of ruin/ruina to read and analyze discourses of decay, fragmentation and dislocation in both corpuses.

Chapter Two is entitled, "Why Not the Private Eye?: The Insider as Outsider in Chester Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) and Leonardo Padura's *Paisaje de Otoño* (1998)." This chapter utilizes various theories of the modern State in order to explore concerns of social positionality and select State power relative to the police detective protagonists and the police procedural forms in the two novels in question. Both novels serve as the culminating texts for both series. In this chapter, I aim to answer the questions 1) what is the authorial intent bound up with the decision use the police procedural form for both detective series? And 2) how do the respective police protagonists operate within the texts in order to interrogate or uphold State power?

In doing so, I use selected critical texts regarding the understanding of the modern State apparatus written by Althusser, Gramsci and Foucault to build the idea of the State and its corresponding law-enforcement arm as part in parcel of a Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). I argue that the police procedural is used, instead of the hard-boiled fiction structure which traditionally employs a private detective protagonist, such that both novels are able to attend to the RSA, in their respective socio-political milieu.

I contend that Grave Digger Jones, Coffin Ed Johnson and Mario Conde, the three police protagonists, operate as outsider figures, racialized Others in the case of the first two, and a ideological Other in the case of the latter. At the same time I posit that the police protagonists also operate as insider figures, extensions of the RSA working from within. I spend the remainder of the chapter analyzing the manner in which the police protagonists realize their hybrid identities, insiders that are outsiders and vice versa, to judiciously deploy their State

power to trouble the RSA within which they operate, and at times, to maintain it—wittingly or unwittingly.

The third and final chapter is entitled "'I Will Survive': Performance and the Politics of Self-Preservation in Chester Himes's *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965) and Leonardo Padura's *Máscaras* (1997)." In it, I deploy theories of performance to analyze various performative modalities as survival strategies—creative responses to fragment and ruin—in the two novels in mention. In the first place, I engage the performance theories of scholars such as Erving Goffman and José Muñoz to explore linkages between performance, subjectivity, personhood and agency. I'm interested in the way in which those that Goffman calls "cynical performers" forge artifices like "fronts" and masks as tools in the process of self-making. Second, I utilize the scholarship of Albert Murray, Fred Moten, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Paul Gilroy among others to discuss African-American and Caribbean/Cuban performative traditions related to improvisational modes of being and expression, "blues idioms" and jazz aesthetics as mechanisms for self-preservation. Third, I explore the use of quotidian Cuban and African-American performative strategies—"el invento" and "hustles"--as survival mechanisms in the face of fragment and social decay. In turn, I identity "trickster figures" in both novels and analyze the extent to which they realize "inventos" and hustles as survival techniques.

In the remainder of the chapter, I use Richard Hornby's scholarship on meta-theater to discuss meta-performance and role-playing in the texts. I conclude with an exploration of the signification of the trope of the mask in both novels and its dual function of concealment and revelation. I attend to concerns with concealment and revelation relevant to socio-political performances in both novels' denouement and discourses of detection and justice which undergird the detective fiction form.

Chapter One

"A Dream Deferred"?: Dynamism, Decay and the Harlem-Havana Idiosyncratic Nexus

"Una ciudad no es un espacio arquitectónico vacío. Es un lugar habitado por almas que cuentan una historia rica y diversa. Conocerlas es un viaje infinito."
--Wendy Guerra, *Instagram*, @wendyguerra, February 21, 2021

"La Habana es una ciudad que se construyó con piedras y con palabras."
--Leonardo Padura, *Agua por todas partes*

"The business of defining Harlem has already been perfected. You have heard them all before: Harlem is *a ruin,* it is *the home of the Negro's Zionism;* it is a *third world country;* an *East Berlin whose Wall is 110 Street.* This is hyperbolic Harlem, *the cultural capital of black America* or its *epicenter* (likening the place to a natural disaster). There is Harlem as Mecca—a city of sanctuary, a place that merges devotion and duty."
--Sharif Rhodes-Pitts, *Harlem is Nowhere*

It's Harlem in Havana time
Step right in!
Silver spangles
See 'em dangle in the farm boy's eyes
Hootchie kootchie
Auntie Ruthie would've died
If she knew we were on the inside.
---Joni Mitchell, "Harlem in Havana"

In his book, *Cuban Palimpsests*, José Quiroga attempts to juxtapose and thereby link discourses of ruin in Harlem and Havana, respectively, vis-a-vis a reading of a present-day dilapidated Hotel Theresa as a "memory palace" for a Harlem-Havana socio-historical exchange realized in 1960 (37). Quiroga uses the Alfred Hitchcock film *Topaz* (1969)—a Cold War spy thriller which is principally set in Harlem's Hotel Theresa or Theresa Hotel in September 1960 which hosted the Cuban delegation in September 1960 in the lead up to Fidel Castro's UN